

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

TO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS PRIORITY

SECSTATE WASHDC 9368

INFO AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY BRAZZAVILLE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 KINSHASA 4089

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, AO

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH BELGIAN AMBASSADOR TO ANGOLA

1. SUMMARY: ANGOLA DESK OFFICER MET IN BRAZZAVILLE APRIL 22 WITH BELGIAN AMBASSADOR TO ANGOLA LECOMTE. ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN LUANDA HAVE IMPROVED SOMEWHAT DURING PAST YEAR, BUT REMAIN POOR, WITH SEVERE PORT DELAYS AND DIVERSION OF IMPORTED GOODS FROM MARKET. LECOMTE CONFIRMED PERVASIVE CUBAN ROLE IN GOVERNMENT. SOVIETS ARE ABOUT TO GET THEIR FOURTH CHIEF OF MISSION IN LESS THAN NINE MONTHS. DURING NETO'S ILLNESS, A POWER STRUGGLE APPEARS TO HAVE BEGUN FOR THE SUCCESSION.

2. SECURITY SITUATION: ACCORDING TO LECOMTE, SECURITY CONDITIONS IN LUANDA ARE GOOD. THE CITY IS QUIET, AND NO REPEAT NO ANIMOSITY IS SHOWN BY LOCAL INHABITANTS TOWARD WESTERNERS, SECURITY OUTSIDE LUANDA, HOWEVER, IS SAID TO BE POOR, AS EVIDENCED BY A DUTCH CITIZEN WHO WAS RECENTLY CAUGHT IN TWO AMBUSHES IN
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NOVO LEDONDO AREA. LECOMTE, WHO HAS BEEN IN LUANDA NINE MONTHS, HAS THEREFORE NOT YET APPLIED FOR PERMISSION TO VISIT OTHER PARTS OF ANGOLA. HE BELIEVES SUCH AN APPLICATION WOULD BE REJECTED ANYWAY, AS HAS BEEN THE CASE WITH FRENCH CHARGE. LECOMTE ALSO COMMENTED THAT ANGOLAN OFFICIALS HAVE RECENTLY STOPPED CLAIMING THAT UNITA WILL BE ELIMINATED SOON. (RECENTLY PROMOTED FROM CHARGE, LECOMTE HAS BEEN UNABLE TO PRESENT CREDENTIALS DUE

NETO'S ILLNESS.)

3. ECONOMIC CONDITIONS: LECOMTE SAID THAT ECONOMIC CONDITIONS HAVE IMPROVED SLIGHTLY SINCE JUNE 1977, WHEN FOOD OF ANY KIND WAS PRACTICALLY UNAVAILABLE. STAPLES--MANIOC, FISH, RICE, COOKING OIL--ARE NOW AVAILABLE IN LIMITED QUANTITIES, WITH LINES FORMING VERY EARLY IN THE MORNING AND MUCH OF THE MERCHANDISE BEING PURCHASED BY LOCAL ENTREPRENEURS FOR RESALE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE. SEVERE CONGESTION IN LUANDA PORT CONTINUES (ALTHOUGH CONDITIONS IN LOBITO ARE REPORTED TO BE BETTER) WITH MONTHS OFTEN REQUIRED FOR OFFLOADING OF IMPORTED GOODS. IN LATE NOVEMBER 1977, A SHIP ARRIVED CONTAINING MERCEDES CARS (FOR USE AT DECEMBER MPLA CONGRESS) PLUS WHEAT FLOUR DONATED BY BELGIAN GOVERNMENT FOR ZAIROIS REFUGEES IN EASTERN ANGOLA. THE MERCEDES WERE OFFLOADED IMMEDIATELY AND THE SHIP WAS THEN SENT BACK OUT INTO THE HARBOR, WHERE IT WAITED TWO MONTHS BEFORE IT WAS ABLE TO DISCHARGE THE FLOUR, WHICH REACHED THE REFUGEES ONLY IN LATE MARCH. (ALTHOUGH OFFICIAL ANGOLAN ESTIMATES PUT THE NUMBER OF THESE REFUGEES AT 220,000 SWEDISH RELIEF OFFICIALS TOLD LECOMTE THEIR ESTIMATE WAS 100,000.) WHEREAS NO NEW AUTOMOBILES WERE VISIBLE IN LUANDA IN JUNE 1977, AN INCREASING NUMBER OF MERCEDES, TOYOTAS, AND OTHER MAKES ARE NOW SEEN ON THE STREETS. LECOMTE ESTIMATES THAT PERHAPS 20 PERCENT OF THE SHOPS IN LUANDA ARE OPEN; HOWEVER, MOST OF THEM HAVE NOTHING FOR SALE, BUT REMAIN OPEN SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY WOULD BE CONFISCATED IF THEY CLOSED. IMPORTS OF CONSUMER GOODS-E.G., REFRIGERATORS--ARE CONTINUING, CONFIDENTIAL

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BUT FEW OF THEM EVER REACH THE MARKET: ABOUT 23 PERCENT ARE ESTIMATED TO BE SKIMMED OFF BY OFFICIALS, ANOTHER 25 PERCENT STOLEN FROM THE DOCKS, AND THE OTHER 50 PERCENT REACHES LUANDA'S REMAINING PORTUGUESE RETAILERS, WHO, HOWEVER, DO NOT PUT THEM ON SALE TO THE PUBLIC BUT RATHER TRADE THEM TO EACH OTHER AND SHIP THEM BACK TO PORTUGAL, SINCE IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO REPATRIATE HARD CURRENCY.

4. CUBANS. LECOMTE SAID THAT CUBANS IN LUANDA GENERALLY BEHAVE THEMSELVES, AND GET ALONG WELL WITH THEIR ANGOLAN COUNTER-PARTS. HE CONFIRMED THAT MANY GOVERNMENT AGENCIES ARE ESSENTIALLY RUN BY CUBANS. LOCAL OFFICIALS OFTEN TELL VISITORS THAT THEY CANNOT ACT ON A MATTER WITHOUT FIRST CONSULTING THEIR CUBAN "ASSESSOR" (ADVISER). THE MAJORITY OF CUBANS IN LUANDA, PARTICULARLY THE OFFICERS, ARE WHITE, ALTHOUGH THE CUBAN AMBASSADOR IS BLACK. CUBAN AMBASSADOR TOLD LECOMTE UPON ARRIVING IN LUANDA SIX MONTHS AGO THAT ANGOLAN GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE TO COME TO SOME SORT OF SETTLEMENT WITH UNITA; LECOMETE, HOWEVER, IS UNSURE WHETHER TO ACCEPT THIS COMMENT AS GENUINELY REFLECTING THE AMBASSADOR'S VIEWS.

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5. SOVIETS. LECOMTE REMARKED THAT THE SOVIETS IN LUANDA, UNLIKE THE CUBANS, KEEP TO THEMSELVES AND BEHAVE LIKE "NEOCOLONIALISTS." SINCE LECOMTE'S ARRIVAL THE SOVIET EMBASSY IN LUANDA HAS BEEN HEADED BY THREE DIFFERENT PEOPLE WITH A FOURTH ON THE WAY. THE THEN SOVIET AMBASSADOR DEPARTED IN THE SUMMER OF 1977, REPORTEDLY FOR TREATMENT OF INJURIES SUFFERED IN A FALL, BUT LECOMTE WONDERS WHETHER THE AMBASSADOR'S DEPARTURE MAY HAVE BEEN RELATED TO THE AMBASSADOR'S REPORTED ADVOCACY OF ACCOMMODATION BETWEEN MPLA AND UNITA. THE NO. 2 SOVIET DIPLOMAT IN LUANDA THEN BECAME ACTING AMBASSADOR", UNTIL HE WAS SUCCEEDED BY ANOTHER "ACTING AMBASSADOR" SENT FROM MOSCOW. LECOMTE HAS NOW RECEIVED A DIPLOMATIC NOTE FROM SOVIETS STATING THAT THEY WILL SOON BE SENDING A NEW AMBASSADOR TO LUANDA.

6. MPLA POLITICS. LECOMTE SAID THAT SINCE THE BEGINNING OF NETO'S CURRENT ILLNESS, NETO HAS DELEGATED CONSIDERABLE TO POWER TO PRIME MINISTER NASCIMENTO, AND AT THE SAME TIME, A POWER STRUGGLE APPEARS TO HAVE BEGUN WITHIN THE MPLA FOR CONTROL
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AFTER NETO. LECOMTE FELT THAT NOT ENOUGH IS KNOWN OF MPLA'S

INNER WORKINGS TO LABEL INDIVIDUAL MPLA LEADERS AS "PRO-SOVIET", "PRO-CUBAN," ETC. HE DID BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT ONE COULD DIVIDE THE MPLA LEADERSHIP ROUGHLY INTO OLDER, MOSTLY MULATTO, MARXIST "THEORETICIANS," SUCH AS MPLA SECRETARY LUCIO LARA, AND YOUNGER, MOSTLY BLACK, "PRACTICAL-MINDED" INDIVIDUALS, WHO ARE LESS CONCERNED WITH FAITHFUL ADHERENCE TO MARXIST IDEOLOGY AND MORE CONCERNED WITH GETTING THINGS DONE. HE ALSO DREW A SIMILAR DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE "THEORETICAL" SOVIETS AND THE "PRACTICAL" CUBANS, ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT EXPLICITLY LINK THE "THEORETICAL" ANGOLANS WITH THE SOVIETS OR THE "PRACTICAL" ANGOLANS WITH THE CUBANS. LECOMTE ALSO SINGLED OUT HUMABO PROVINCIAL COMMISSIONER PEDRO MARIA TONHA (AKA PEDALE) AS A RISING STAR IN THE LEADERSHIP, AND DOUBTED WHETHER, IN A POWER STRUGGLE, DEFENSE MINISTER IKO CARREIRA, WHO IS MULATTO, COULD RETAIN CONTROL OF THE LARGELY BLACK ARMED FORCES. LECOMTE AGREED THAT NASCIMENTO DOES NOT HAVE A STRONG POLITICAL BASE OF HIS OWN, BUT OWES HIS POSITION LARGELY TO NETO'S PATRONAGE; HE SPECULATED THAT NASCIMENTO COULD BECOME PRESIDENT OF A POST-NETO GOVERNMENT IF HE MANAGED TO CAST HIS LOT WITH THE RIGHT GROUP.

7. JOURNALISTS IN LUANDA. LECOMET REPORTED THAT AN AFP CORRESPONDENT RECENTLY ARRIVED IN LUANDA TO REPLACE THE PREVIOUS, ONE, WHO WAS EXPELLED AFTER THE UNSUCCESSFUL COUP ATTEMPT IN MAY 1977. THE ONLY OTHER WESTERN EUROPEAN JOURNALIST RESIDENT IN LUANDA IS AGUSTA CONCHIGLIA (ITALIAN), AUTHOR OF AN ARTICLE ON ANGOLA IN CURRENT ISSUE OF AFRIQUE-ASIE, WHO, ACCORDING TO LECOMTE, REFUSES TO HAVE ANY CONTACT WITH WESTERN DIPLOMATS IN LUANDA.

8. IN A SEPARATE CONVERSATION IN BRAZZAVILLE APRIL 19, EGYPTIAN EMBASSY BRAZZAVILLE COUNSELOR TALLAT, JUST RETURNED FROM A VISIT TO LUANDA, SAID THAT FOOD SITUATION HAD IMPROVED SOMEWHAT SINCE
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HIS LAST VISIT IN MARCH 1977. LUANDA RESIDENTS CAN BUY FOOD BY PRESENTING THEIR RATION CARD AT THEIR LOCAL COOPERATIVE. OF COURSE, ONE CANNOT PREDICT WHICH ITEMS WILL BE AVAILABLE ON A GIVEN DAY. TALLAT SINGLED OUT THE AFOREMENTIONED PEDALE AS "PRO-SOVIET." HE ALSO OBSERVED THAT NETO, DESPITE HIS ANIMOSITY TOWARD MOBUTU, WISHED TO MOVE TOWARD A RAPPROCHEMENT, BUT WAS RESTRAINED BY SOVIET/CUBAN INFLUENCE FROM DOING SO.
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